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WASHINGTON'S FAREWELL¹

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SCENE: *Mount Vernon. Midday.* (Mistress Martha Washington sitting crocheting, on a vine-covered veranda, occasionally using a large turkey fan. Enter Caesar.)

Caesar: Two ladies is wantin' to see yo', Mis' Washin'ton. They's got sewin' things, and they're goin' on 'bout this 'ere heat, 's though they'd—

Martha Washington: Tell the ladies I will be with them directly, Caesar. Do not talk further but bring three glasses of cooled punch from the kitchen. (*Enter two ladies.*)

The Elder: Truly, Mistress Washington, we could scarcely abide the intensity of the heat in the parlor, and so have made free, unbidden, to seek the cool shade of your honeysuckle.

Martha Washington: And I am glad you have, Mistress Peniston. Had I known it were you, I should have stopped Caesar's prattle and bidden you come out here at once.

Mistress Peniston: Mistress Martha, I have brought with me a guest, my niece, the youngest daughter of Captain Wayne, because I could no longer endure her incessant requests, nay, demands! to behold our great President. Doubtless I should have first sought leave to bring so young—

Martha Washington: He will be much pleased when I tell him how popular he has become among the younger folk. Take seats and excuse me while I send a recruit, as Mr. Washington would say, to fetch over-talkative Caesar. (*Calls. Exit a minute; returns.*) And so, my dear, you have braved this intolerable heat in order to meet Mr. Washington. You shall not remain unrewarded, for if—

¹A play for Washington's Birthday written by a Senior in the High School, Trenton, New Jersey.

Miss Wayne (rather confused): Pray, Mistress Washington, do not allow me to disturb his Excellency. Aunt Gainor Peniston would have me seem a forward and ungrateful guest (*enter Caesar*) but, in truth; well, really! I suppose I am, but I do hope I am not.

Caesar (quickly): Dem mens what Marse' was waitin' for' all mornin' done come, and I's been usherin' 'em in, an' huntin' Marse'—an'—I done forgot dat 'ere punch.

Martha Washington: Caesar, bring the punch here to me at once. Mr. Washington has provided for his guests and will not need you. (*Exit Caesar.*) Let us hope nothing will occur to detain Caesar on his errand this time, for then we shall have something cool to drink and can begin on our knitting.

Mistress Peniston: Mr. Alexander Hamilton rode past our plantation this early noon in great haste. I sent out a servant to bid him stop for refreshment, but he stayed only a minute, declaring he was in a hurry to reach Mt. Vernon ere noon. (*Caesar has entered with cool punch and glasses. Martha Washington has dismissed him and distributed punch.*) What an excellent concoction. One of your own special recipes?

Martha Washington: It is an old English drink and a great favorite of Mr. Washington's. What an attractive pattern you are working, Miss Wayne. It is new to me. Where did you learn the stitch?

Miss Wayne: I copied it, Mistress Washington, from one of Aunt Gainor's old table covers—

Mistress Peniston: The child is unusually quick in such matters. For one of her years, she has completed some fine work.

Miss Wayne: Indeed, Mistress Washington, I fear 'tis not at all so. I shall never be satisfied until I can do such wonderful knitting as yours.

Martha Washington: 'Tis not hard to learn, my dear. But come, the sun will be here before we are aware of it. Let us seek a cooler spot in the garden. (*As Martha Washington speaks, voices are heard. Alexander Hamilton and David Claypoole enter.*)

Alexander Hamilton: Do not let us disturb you, ladies. Mistress Peniston, why do you bring such intolerable heat? I have ordered a light shower to lessen the humidity.

Mistress Peniston: Indeed, sir, 'twas Mr. Claypoole, not I, who brought you such weather.

Martha Washington: You gentlemen will cease to complain of what Mistress Peniston brought with her when you meet Miss Wayne, her niece. Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Claypoole you met, of course, at your Aunt's today, my dear?

Alexander Hamilton: We are most delighted to know the daughter of one of our country's bravest and best supporters. Your uncle, we trust, is well, Miss Wayne?

Miss Wayne: Yes, gentlemen, and he desired me to present his regards to you both.

Alexander Hamilton: I am sorry he could not have accompanied them; but we are well satisfied with his substitute.

Mistress Peniston: You were in a heated discussion when you were approaching the veranda, gentlemen, and I assure you, you have selected a most suitable spot to wage a hot controversy, for the mercury in the thermometer has long since reached its highest limit.

Martha Washington: Then we ladies will resign this place in your favor, gentlemen, and seek a more comfortable atmosphere. *(All three begin to gather sewing implements.)*

David Claypoole (visibly anxious to talk alone with Hamilton): Do not let us be the cause of your departure. But, since you are determined to leave, if you should chance to see his Excellency, pray tell him that we await his pleasure. *(Bows.)*

Martha Washington: Take care not to fan the embers of the hot debate you three were arguing. I shall send Caesar with something cool to quench the flame in case it blaze too furiously.

Alexander Hamilton: We are to decide a most vital question and Caesar's contribution will be most gratefully accepted. We thank you for your hospitality, Mistress Washington. *(Exit ladies.)*

David Claypoole (seated at table opposite Mr. Hamilton): You say you do not believe General Washington will consent to a third term of presidency?

Alexander Hamilton: For the past four months I have daily urged him to re-enter the field of political activity, but he firmly refuses and rarely changes when once he is decided.

David Claypoole: But, sir, cannot he be shown how greatly he is needed? Now, more than ever before, this newly founded system requires a proficient statesman to guide it over the treacherous sea of experience. What was the use of securing our precious liberty if it cannot be maintained? He alone is demanded as the captain for this new "ship of state." How can he possibly deny his country in its hour of greatest necessity?

Alexander Hamilton: My dear Claypoole, pray consider the matter sanely. You forget—

David Claypoole: I forget nothing, sir. "Consider the matter sanely," indeed! It is you who seem to be bereft of common reason. *You* forget—the debt of the government, the countless disagreements of the various states yet to be definitely settled, the poverty of our citizens, exhausted by the financial and human devastation which our Revolution has spread broadcast. Forget? The mere word "Washington" is enough to pacify our troublesome people. Doubtless, in some four years more, national affairs will have assumed a comparatively tranquil aspect. The work has been originated by him, begun by him, and now that it is merely started he would leave it to be completed haphazard by someone else. What other duty calls him from this presidency? I tell you, sir (*much agitated*)—(*Caesar has entered carrying tray on which are glasses, etc.*)

Alexander Hamilton (interrupting): Claypoole, where you believe yourself to be supporting our country's father most vehemently, just there do you fail to render him the service he would demand of you. For twenty years he has been absent from his home, and his home is to him as dear as yours to you or mine to me—no, dearer, for has he not been away from it long enough to make its associations doubly precious? At first, for months, I regarded his refusal, as do you, with short-sighted spectacles, but after much talk with him about the matter I changed my glasses for a long-sighted pair, as you also will do, I am sure.

David Claypoole: Impossible, sir, impossible—

Alexander Hamilton (interrupting): Ah, not in the least impossible. The world acknowledges him as the "greatest of good men and the best of great men." Let us trust to his wisdom and abide

by his own decree. He himself is the best judge of what is expedient. With his integrity and his loyalty, his unselfishness and his patriotism, his judgment and his good sense, he has served us Americans unceasingly for many years and throughout grave crises. Shall we attempt to dictate to him after he has undergone eight years of severe public servitude? The world neither knows nor cares what you or I think or do. Why should we be the ones to oppose such as he? (*Claypoole has evidenced signs of changing, and footsteps have been heard. General Washington now enters, and the men at the table at once rise.*)

General Washington: My much-needed friends, I am glad to welcome you to Mt. Vernon. Mistress Washington informed me that two gentlemen who were on the side veranda "awaited my pleasure," and I am most pleased to be with you.

David Claypoole: Your Excellency, Mr. Hamilton informs me that you have declined renomination. Cannot you be persuaded to reconsider your refusal?

General Washington: I have considered that matter thoughtfully and at great length, Mr. Claypoole, and I have concluded not to enter the field of politics again. Months were required to convince Mr. Hamilton of the wisdom of the decision. I am sure a few minutes of careful thought will suffice to show you the policy of my action. Four years ago I wished very much to retire, but yielded to the expressed wish of my friends. I feel certain that others, fully as competent as I, would feel more freedom in expressing their opinions if "Washington the politician" ceased to exist. But now, gentlemen, to the business of the day. In view of the fact that I am about to go out of office, I have begun to consider the subject of a farewell address for the American people, who throughout the twenty years of my public service have been my sympathetic benefactors. "My wish is that the whole may appear in a plain style, and be handed to the public in an honest, unaffected, simple garb."

Alexander Hamilton: When does your Excellency propose to deliver this address?

General Washington: I had thought to have it published and delivered to the people through the press.

David Claypoole: Published? The people cannot be led to accept as final your decision concerning renomination. They will demand that you deliver the address to them in person. (*Enter the ladies.*) Mistress Washington, cannot you persuade his Excellency to accept a third term of office? All our efforts have been in vain.

Mistress Washington: Indeed, I am overjoyed to discover that he is invulnerable to your persuasion. He sorely needs the rest and relaxation that Mt. Vernon shall furnish.

Mistress Peniston: Do not let us interrupt your discussion, gentlemen. The complexities of politics do not require our presence, but may we not wait to hear the decision General Washington pronounces?

General Washington: Indeed, Mistress Peniston, we shall be honored if you choose to remain. The subject, I fear, may prove rather dry, but still it is important to us who are here, and on that account interesting. We were considering the matter of a farewell address. I had not thought the delivery of the address necessary, Mr. Claypoole. What should you say, Mr. Hamilton, as to that means of sending it to the people rather than publishing it?

Alexander Hamilton: By all means deliver it—and publish it also. The possession of the farewell words of your Excellency will be coveted as a treasure by each and every citizen. But, your Excellency, with, next to your own, the country's welfare nearest at heart, we implore you most earnestly to reconsider this matter of the presidency.

General Washington: This phase of the question I have definitely settled, and I have made my decision known to you. I beg you, gentlemen, not to think that I am any less interested in the affairs of our nation or in your future interests, but I believe the time has arrived when I may return to my retirement from which I was so reluctantly drawn. Let us dismiss that subject permanently. In looking forward to the moment when my career in public life will end, however, I wish to give my beloved countrymen my heartfelt thanks for the many honors conferred on me, but still more for the confidence with which they have supported me. Here, perhaps I ought to stop. But a solicitude for their welfare which

cannot end but with my life urges me to bring to their attention some sentiments which appear to me as all-important to the permanency of their happiness as a people. The unity of government which constitutes them one people will need constant protection and care, for it is the main pillar in the edifice of their independence and the point of attack of both their internal and external enemies. While every part of the country feels an immediate and particular interest in the Union, all parts combined cannot fail to find greater strength, greater resources, and less interruption of their peace by foreign nations, and more—what is of inestimable value—they will derive a Union exempt from wars and broils between themselves. In this sense the Union ought to be considered as the main prop of their liberty and the love of the one ought to endear to them the preservation of the other. These considerations demand the hearty co-operation of every virtuous citizen and the hope of the continuance of the Union as the primary object of patriotic desire.

Claypoole: But who knows to what end the nation will come?

George Washington: To listen to speculation in such a case is criminal. It is well worth a fair and full experiment.

Claypoole: What of its enemies?

George Washington: There will always be reason to distrust the patriotism of those who in any quarter may endeavor to weaken its bonds. Toward the preservation of this government and the permanency of the present happy state it is a requisite, not only that we steadily discountenance irregular oppositions to its authority, but also that we resist with care the spirit of innovation upon its principles.

Alexander Hamilton: What would be your policy toward foreign nations?

Washington: Observe good faith and justice toward all nations, cultivate peace and harmony with all people. Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence, however, let me warn you. The jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake, since history and experience prove that this is one of the most baneful foes of republican government. In offering to my countrymen these counsels as an old and affectionate friend, I feel that I shall be fully recom-

pensed if they should be thought deserving of even the slightest amount of consideration.

(During the recital, Caesar should enter; at the conclusion, after a brief pause, Alexander Hamilton should first break the silence.)

Alexander Hamilton: When your countrymen have heard such words, worthy of none but your Excellency, it will be harder than ever for them to accept your final decision. But no more fitting close to such a career as yours could possibly be made.

David Claypoole: It is an address which will show posterity the sterling worth of their country's father, the man to whom their prosperity may be attributed.

Caesar: Der is a man, Marse, what say he come from New York to see *Mister* Washin'ton 'bout t'baccy. *Mister* Washin'ton! He ain't got no mo' idea how to talk 'bout de President than a—

Mistress Washington: Hush, Caesar. Mistress Peniston, let us balance our minds, weighted down with politics, with some simpler diversion. Miss Wayne, you have promised to tell me how you like my spinet, and I am going to demand your opinion immediately.

Miss Wayne: Indeed, Mistress Washington, I can safely assert beforehand that 'twill be I, not the spinet, that will be found at fault.

Mistress Washington: Well, Miss Modesty, we are going to prove the contrary of your statement. Gentlemen, will you excuse us? *(Caesar has already gone off. Exeunt.)*

General Washington: You see, gentlemen, that I must bend my energy to merchants rather than to foreign diplomats, and raise tobacco crops rather than the tariff. And now, let us review the plantation, which I fear is sadly in need of a revision of some sort, and refresh ourselves generally.

(Exeunt.)